

The “Non-Standard” Mission

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Abstract

My field artillery unit was mobilized to perform a non-standard military police mission during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. The unit was part of the largest National Guard mobilization from our state since the Vietnam era. The challenges of deploying a field artillery unit as an ad hoc MP company were many. The challenges were overcome through the strength of our NCO Corps. As I write this paper, I am preparing for a deployment, a non-standard mission with my current unit. As I compare the two mobilizations, it is apparent that the process for mobilizing, training and preparing our soldiers has improved since the first rotation, but issues concerning the selection of units for non-standard mission still exist five years later.

Mobilization

Headquarters 2-197th Field Artillery received the mobilization order on 29 November 2003. Our battalion was tasked with providing a 184 man Military Police (MP) Co for duty in Iraq. The mobilization order did not provide any information concerning the mission or specific locations, only the mobilization date of 5 January 2004. With only thirty four days to prepare our soldiers, we needed to respond quickly. The first order of business was to identify which of the 400 assigned soldiers from within our ranks would fill the MP company force structure provided to us. The manning document consisted of the battery headquarters, operations center, and four platoons with three squads each. Our battalion staff was already bare, as almost all of the staff had already been identified to deploy with our brigade headquarters for a separate mission. I was the Operations NCO for the battalion and had already been selected to serve as the Rear Detachment NCO. I was tasked with filling the manning document for this MP mission. Our Battalion Commander directed that Battery A would be the base unit, and the remainder of the positions would be filled from the remaining units. Battery A filled the battery headquarters and one platoon. Battery B and Battery C each filled a platoon, and HHS filled the Operations Center positions.

Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP) began that week. All medical and personnel issues were taken care of, as well as ensuring all soldiers were provided a full issue of individual equipment. We were told that all other equipment would be provided at the mobilization

station or in theatre. Two weeks remained before mobilization. As a field artillery unit, we did not have any personnel with military police training or experience. But within our ranks, we identified thirty soldiers, most were NCOs, whom had civilian experience as policeman or correction officers. These NCOs stepped up to develop a basic training plan to provide the remaining soldiers with a basic knowledge detainee operations, search tactics, and escort operations.

Mobilization Station

HHS 2-197th FA FWD (MP) traveled to Fort Dix, NJ on 5 January 2004. Over the next 42 days, the unit conducted the normal mobilization station tasks, such as SRP, theatre briefs, and RFI fielding. Post-mobilization training was limited to individual soldier skills. The last week at Fort Dix, convoy training was provided. This improvised MP Company, consisting of 184 field artillery soldiers, were considered ready to deploy. There was not enough time or assets to provide our unit with any official MP training. The mobilization station was not prepared to train these ad hoc units that were literally being pushed through for quick deployments. The unit still did not know what its mission would be in theatre, but at least now we knew the destination was Mosul, Iraq.

Location Assignment

The majority of the unit arrived in Kuwait on 20 February 2004. Upon arrival in Camp Virginia, confusion set in, as orders had not yet arrived and nobody knew what mission or location my unit was scheduled to conduct. Two days later, an LNO from Mosul arrived with instructions to convoy to Mosul. After conducting the Kuwait specific training, the unit began its journey to Mosul. By 12 March 2004, most of the unit had arrived in Mosul. The unit we were replacing had already left theatre. All their equipment was left behind for our unit to fall in on. The Property Book Officer that was signed for all the equipment was home on leave, which created initial problems with settling into the area.

Our Company Commander received orders that one platoon was needed to support Task Force Olympia by providing combat patrols throughout Mosul. The remainder of the unit was ordered to retrograde to FOB Danger, Tikrit. The unit was also tasked to provide security for the 503rd Military Police Battalion from Mosul to FOB Speicher as they conducted their retrograde to FOB Danger. The unit arrived in Tikrit on 18 March 2004 after successfully completing the security operations. Once in Tikrit, the unit was once again split up. The commander received orders from 1st Infantry Division to provide one platoon and a headquarters slice to supplement the 293rd MP Battalion in BaQubah. On 25 March 2004, 2nd Platoon along with a slice element from the Headquarters platoon traveled to BaQubah. The remainder of the unit, comprised of the Headquarters platoon, 1st and 4th platoon remained in FOB Danger.

Theatre Operations

The unit was now split into three locations which obviously created unique command and control challenges. 3rd Platoon received its orders from 3rd ID in Mosul, but received limited support. They were directed to receive its support from our unit headquarters in FOB Danger. The remainder of the unit conducted operations under 1st ID. Operations for the unit continued until their RIP in early February 2005. HHS 2-197th FA conducted a wide array of Combat Support Operations ranging from Area Security Operations, Maneuver Mobility Support Operations, and Police Intelligence Operations in Mosul, Tikrit, and BaQubah..

3rd Platoon conducted over 600 combat patrols of the east side of Mosul, assisting Task Force Olympia units with area security by disrupting, capturing or killing Anti-Iraqi Forces conducting small arms, rocket propelled grenade, mortar and rocket attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces.

In BaQubah, 2nd Platoon conducted joint operations with the Iraqi Police Services (IPS). Our soldiers were able to provide training on evidence procedures, desk operations, investigations, corrections operations and antiterrorism force protection based on their years of expertise as civilian police and corrections officers. Our soldiers also instructed the Transitional Integration Program (TIP) Academy for Diyala Province, successfully graduating over 1200 Iraqi Police. Their work with the Criminal Investigations of Diyala led to over 230 arrests of insurgents and criminals, and the capture of 24 terrorist cells

working in the Diyala Province. Their investigations assisted in the seizure of over 15 tons of explosives and led to a substantial reduction of IED and mortar attacks.

In Tikrit, 1st Platoon soldiers conducted combat patrol escorts and detainee backhaul operations. They conducted over 350 missions and transported over 2,000 detainees throughout Task Force Danger and III Corps Area of Operations. 1st Platoon also conducted a 24 hour Force Protection mission and augmented 1st Military Police Company in the Division Centralized Collection Point and provided security for the release of over 1,200 detainees from Abu Ghraib prison. 4th Platoon provided security to the Tikrit Police Academy facilitating the graduation of approximately 2,300 Iraqi Police for the Salah Ad Din Province. They provided training on weapons, individual and vehicle searches as well as area security in order to ensure the success of the Iraqi Police.

Our unit also managed contracts totaling over \$7,300,000 for equipment and building upgrades to eleven main police stations and 38 substations which greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the 5000 Iraqi Police Officers in the Diyala Province. The unit also aided the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) by escorting equipment and supplies to the Bayji Oil refinery as well as escorting convoys of uniforms, vehicles, weapons, and ammunition to the Iraqi Security Forces. Our unit also escorted elements of the Iraqi National Guard and Iraqi Commando Units in support of operations in Baghdad and Mosul, ensuring these forces arrived safely in order to operate with the Coalition in defeating Anti-Iraqi Forces.

Rear Detachment Operations

I conducted a wide range of duties as the Rear Detachment NCOIC. I was the primary POC with our unit throughout its deployment, and maintained daily voice or email communication with the unit. Because the unit was in three locations and split under different commands, it was difficult for them at times to obtain support they required. I assisted in providing them support in various ways. The unit attempted to obtain unit DODAACs for 30 days, but was unable to do so because they had deployed with a derivative UIC, and not a “AA” UIC. The unit and I coordinated directly with LOGSA to eventually provide them with a DODAAC that was critically needed to request much needed supplies and parts for their equipment. I also oversaw all personnel actions that were required to be processed through our state headquarters to NGB, such as promotions. When the unit first arrived in theatre, they did not receive all of the vehicles that they required to perform all of its assigned missions. I was able to assist in filling their shortages by coordination efforts through National Guard Bureau (NGB) to Forces Command (FORSCOM).

Our battalion had over 150 soldiers still remaining in New Hampshire. These soldiers were assigned to our four units that were located in seven different towns and cities throughout the state. With most of our Battalion Staff deployed, I performed different staff roles throughout the year to ensure our soldiers received quality training. Most of these soldiers were junior enlisted, as most of the NCOs were deployed. Due to the lack of NCO

and officer leadership within the ranks, all of the training was limited to individual soldier tasks. Some field artillery training did occur, but was limited due to our current situation. Other duties included close relations with all of our Family Support Groups, as well as Casualty Notification and Assistance duties.

Mission Accomplished

The unit was replaced in early February 2005, and its mission complete as they redeployed through Kuwait and returned to Fort Dix, NJ during the period 18-26 February 2005. With no formal MP training and very limited convoy security training, the unit had successfully completed every mission it was asked to conduct. Soldiers of HHS 2-197th FA were subjected to numerous attacks by IEDs, direct small arms fire engagements, RPGs and multiple indirect fire attacks. On October 15th, 2004, an IED explosion took the life of one of our soldiers, SPC Alan Burgess. Also, from amongst our ranks were awarded 20 Purple Hearts, four Bronze Stars and well over 60 Army Commendation Medals with V device. In addition, HHS 2-197th FA was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation and the Valorous Unit Award Citation. The success of this deployment was due to the strength of our NCO Corps. Their ability to adapt to any situation with minimal army training, and the expertise they brought from their civilian experience were major factors in getting the job done.

Reintegration

Our soldiers returned to New Hampshire in March 2005 and conducted REFRAD operations. In June 2005, they began attending unit drills and reintegrating with the rest of our battalion. It did not take long to realize that the deployment had caused many field artillery skills to perish. We now had to focus on retraining the basics of field artillery once again to rebuild our skills. This mindset was quickly curbed when we received orders that our state would be joining in the Army Transformation plan. Our Field Artillery Brigade and two Field Artillery Battalions would be converting to a Fires Brigade, one HIMARS Battalion, one Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) and standing up a new Signal Company. Over the next two years, this conversion consumed all of our training time. As of October 2009, we have been transformed into our new structure for two years. The HIMARS Battalion just recently received their HIMARS and completed the New Equipment Training (NET) in September 2009. In November 2009, these HIMARS will be placed in storage, as the entire Brigade is now preparing for another deployment. Once again, this deployment will not be a field artillery mission, but a non-standard SECFOR mission.

Comparison

As our Brigade prepares for this upcoming mobilization, I think of the differences between this one, and the deployment in 2004. HHS, 2-197th FA mobilized in a little over 30 days notice, and did not have satisfactory training to conduct their non-standard

mission. This time, our Brigade was scheduled for the rotation and we have had more than a year to prepare. Our mobilization station is prepared to provide the post mobilization training required for us to perform our mission. The changes in preparing our soldiers for deployment have significantly improved since the early years of OIF/OEF.

What has not changed is the use of field artillery units to perform non-standard missions. As our Fires Brigade has recently transformed, we have just begun to learn the complexity of skills and tasks required to perform our assigned wartime mission. But we will put all of that aside in order to conduct a SECFOR type mission. This will entail pre-mobilization training for a year, and then the one year deployment, which means two years away from training in our field artillery mission. Looking back at the 2004 deployment, it required two training years to rebuild our perishable skills to a level where we could complete our mission. Add these two years, to the two years we will spend preparing for deployment and the deployment itself, adds up to four years that a field artillery brigade is not available to complete its field artillery tasks to standard.

Another area of concern that has not changed since the 2004 deployment is the use of the Deployment Manning Documents (DMD) for non-standard missions. Changing the task organization of a National Guard unit for deployment creates challenges. In our case, our Fires Brigade consists of six fires battalions, a BSB, a Signal Co and a Target Acquisition Battery that are located across state lines in five states. Changing the task organization using a DMD limits the Brigade’s ability to conduct collective Pre-mobilization training prior to arrival at mobilization station.

Lastly, there is one similarity between these two deployments. The mission will be accomplished with the utmost of pride and professionalism because of the strength, agility and capability of our Non-Commissioned Officer Corps.